

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 6112

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, IS, JO
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER: EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ARABS
IN GAZA AND WEST BANK

REF: TEL AVIV 6048

1. DURING MY MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN AND DEF
MIN WEIZMAN LAST NIGHT (REPORTED SEPTELS) I ASKED BEGIN
TO AMPLIFY ON REASONS BEHIND CABINET'S DECISION TO ACCORD
RIGHTS TO ARABS IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA STRIP EQUAL
TO THOSE IN ISRAEL PROPER.

2. OBVIOUSLY EXPECTING MY QUESTION, BEGIN VIGOROUSLY
RESPONDED THAT THE DECISION WAS BASED ON PURELY HUMANE
AND MORAL CONSIDERATIONS. IT WAS NOT A POLITICAL
DECISION "AND ALL OTHER INTERPRETATIONS ARE OUT OF THE
BLUE."

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3. ACCORDING TO THE PM, IMPETUS FOR THE CABINET'S
ACTION CAME FROM DAYAN. HE SAID THAT AS WE BOTH
KNOW DAYAN IS AN OBSTINATE MAN. FOR SEVEN YEARS HE
HAD BEEN PROMOTING THE CONCEPT OF EQUAL RIGHTS FOR THE
ARABS. HE AGREED WITH DAYAN THAT IT WAS A SHAMEFUL
SITUATION ONE MILLION PEOPLE LIVED "IN ISRAEL" UNDER

A DIFFERENT SET OF STANDARDS RELATING, FOR EXAMPLE, TO ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE, ELECTRICITY, WATER AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION. EQUALLY OFFENSIVE WAS THE SITUATION PERTAINING TO SITUATIONS IN WHICH ARAB CHILDREN NO MORE THAN 12-15 YEARS OLD WERE BEING EMPLOYED BY JEWS. THIS WAS 19TH CENTURY EXPLOITATION AND HIS GOVERNMENT INTENDED TO PUT A STOP TO IT. IT WOULD TAKE YEARS TO IMPLEMENT SUCH SOCIAL CHANGES, BUT WHAT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO UNDERSTAND WAS 1) THE STRENGTH OF THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO REDRESS SOCIAL INJUSTICES IN JUDEA, SAMARIA AND THE GAZA STRIP, AND 2) THE FACT NO POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS WHATSOEVER SHOULD BE ASCRIBED TO THIS COMMITMENT.

4. I ASKED WHY GOLAN AND SINAI HADN'T BEEN INCLUDED. WEIZMAN LAMELY RESPONDED THAT "IT WAS JUST EASIER TO TALK ABOUT THE WEST BANK AND GAZA. BUT THE SAME WILL BE DONE FOR THEM," VIZ GOLAN AND GAZA. BEGIN ADDED THAT HE HAD WANTED TO ESTABLISH SOME NEW COURTS AND APPOINT JUSTICES IN THE SINAI TO REPLACE THE LONG ABSENT EGYPTIAN JUDGES, "BUT I KNEW THERE WOULD BE SUCH A FUSS THAT I SAID LET'S POSTPONE IT."

5. WHEN I PRESSED FOR INFORMATION ABOUT WHERE THE MONEY WOULD COME TO FINANCE SUCH PROGRAMS, BEGIN MERELY RESPONDED THAT IT WOULD TAKE YEARS TO IMPLEMENT
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THE CHANGES. WEIZMAN SAID HE HAD ALREADY TOLD WEST BANK AND GAZA MAYORS THEY WERE WELCOME TO BRING IN "NON-PLO" MONEY IF THEY WISHED. THE MORE MONEY THAT CAME IN FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES THE EASIER THE TASK WOULD BE. HE NOTED HE HAD RECENTLY APPROVED A 2 MILLION DOLLAR PROJECT SPONSORED BY THE GAZA MAYOR USING FUNDS FROM ABU DHABI.

6. WHEN I PROBED ABOUT PLANS FOR CHANGES IN ANY LAWS OR TAX STRUCTURES, WEIZMAN FIRST SAID NO LAWS WOULD BE AFFECTED, THEN HEDGED BY OBSERVING THAT HE WASN'T SURE ABOUT TAXES. BEGIN COMMENTED THAT THE ARABS ALREADY PAID THE VALUE ADDED TAX, BUT THE FACT WAS THEY PAID APPRECIABLY LOWER TAXES THAN ISRAELI CITIZENS.

7. BEGIN THEN SPOKE WARMLY OF HIS APPRECIATION FOR THE ABSENCE OF OFFICIAL WASHINGTON REACTION TO THIS DEVELOPMENT. I SAID HE SHOULD BE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS. I PREDICTED THAT THE PRESSURES TO SAY SOMETHING WOULD SOON BECOME INSURMOUNTABLE. IT WAS FOR THIS REASON THAT I HAD WANTED TO UNDERSTAND DIRECTLY FROM BEGIN THE INTENT OF THIS DECISION. INEVITABLY WE WOULD HAVE

TO COMMENT PUBLICLY. BEGIN SAID HE UNDERSTOOD, AND HE INSISTED THAT HIS ACTIONS WERE MOTIVATED "PURELY TO DO JUSTICE AND GOOD TO HUMANITY. WE LIVE WITH THEM. WE HAD TO DO THIS."

8. COMMENT: DESPITE BEGIN'S PROTESTATIONS OF HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS - WHICH I DO NOT CHALLENGE - THE OBVIOUS HASTE WITH WHICH THIS DECISION WAS TAKEN LEAVES US SPECULATING ABOUT WHERE THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL IMPERATIVES OF BEGIN'S ACTION END AND THE RANK AMATEURISM OF HIS GOVERNMENT BEGINS. THE DIS-ARRAY HIS MINISTRIES ARE DEMONSTRATING IN FIELDING QUESTIONS ABOUT IMPLEMENTING THE DECISION (SEE SEPTEL FOR ANALYSIS OF DECISION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS) ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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VIVID EVIDENCE THAT MOST OF THE GOVERNMENT WAS CAUGHT OFF BALANCE BY THE ANNOUNCEMENT. IT IS TRUE THAT DAYAN, WEIZMAN, AND BEGIN HIMSELF HAVE LONG BEEN DETERMINED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT EQUALIZING SERVICES. THEY HAVE TALKED TO ME ABOUT IT INTERMITTANTLY SINCE THEIR ELECTION. BUT I CANNOT BELIEVE THERE IS NOT A POLITICAL ELEMENT IN THIS PRECISE TIMING. WHATEVER ONE'S JUDGMENT ON THIS POINT, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE CANNOT LONGER AVOID PUBLIC COMMENT WHICH, WHILE ACCEPTING THE HUMANITARIAN PURPOSE OF THE DECISION, NOTES MORE IN SORROW THAN IN ANGER THAT SUCH ACTIONS AT THIS JUNCTURE ARE BOUND TO COMPLICATE THE PEACE PROCESS. BEGIN KNOWS FROM OUR CONVERSATION LAST NIGHT THAT SOME KIND OF STATEMENT IN THE NEAR FUTURE IS LIKELY.
LEWIS

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